

VZCZCXYZ0017
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRA #0787 2951337
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 221337Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY RIGA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4453

UNCLAS RIGA 000787

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
DEPT FOR EUR/NB, G/IWI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [KWMN](#) [LG](#)
SUBJECT: Latvia's Woman of Courage Nominee 2008
REF: STATE 126072

¶1. Post's nominee for the International Woman of Courage Award is Anita Ratkevica, social worker and founder of the NGO women's support club "Harmonija." Ms. Ratkevica is pleased to be nominated for the award.
Biographical data requested in reftel is below.

¶A. Full Name: Anita Ratkevica
¶B. Job Title: Social Worker, Skaista Municipality
C: Date of Birth: June 25, 1959
D: Country of Birth: Latvia
E: Citizenship: Latvian
F: Telephone: (371) 2 6388637
G: Address: Kraslavas rajons, Skaistas pagasts, "Teneismuiqa", LV-5671
H: Email: Sac2@inbox.lv
I: Passport Number:

¶2. Ms. Ratkevica is an extraordinary woman in extraordinary circumstances. To understand the importance of her work, it is necessary to grasp the desperation of the region in which she works. In Latvian "Skaista" means beautiful. But with unemployment rates of 15.4% and a shrinking youth population lost to the promise of employment abroad, it is evident that the future of this rural region is not so lovely. Infrastructure challenges such as poor road conditions, (which, during some seasons, impede most travel), few employers, and the inability of the region to meet the criteria to obtain EU funding create a vicious cycle which has the potential to spiral the remaining population into a hopeless void. This is Ms. Ratkevica's world. This is where "Hamonija" was born.

¶3. The history of the NGO "Harmonija" spans over ten years of societal change and culture shift in the developing nation of Latvia. In 1996 Ms. Ratkevica in a group from Skaista participated in a national project called "Raising family's self-organizational capacity through the development of self-esteem and social security." That participation sparked a momentum which culminated Ms. Ratkevica's establishment of the women-focused NGO "Harmonija" in 1998. In 2001 the NGO Skaista's Support Center was established. Seven years later, the aim of the organization is to "develop the rural environment, raise self-organization skills and the capacity of rural residents through development of self-esteem and social security."

¶4. Ms. Ratkevica's background is education. She worked for 15 years as a teacher in kindergarten and elementary schools, then became head of the Skaista council's social service. As Ms. Ratkevica stated, "In my work I had to meet with socially inactive people who had to go through various difficult situations in their daily lives. The desire to help these people motivated me to come up with ... initiatives and involve people in these activities. It is good if a financial support is provided to these people, however, that is not enough. My biggest desire is that people who live in rural areas would ... realize that each of them is needed and unique with his/her background and life vision." According to Skaista City Council head Gundega Grisane, Ratkevica's real gif is "in

motivating and encouraging other women, especially single mothers
... to look at life from a new perspective."

¶15. Ms. Ratkevica and the Center's programs run the spectrum of support, from training women in handicrafts and how to start their own businesses from home, to an after school childcare center. With each carefully-planned activity and program, this rural area sees development that brings hope to an often forgotten segment of society. To work with people in this area and persist in desperate times makes Ms. Ratkevica a true woman of courage.

SELDOWITZ